FREE

TAGA SPORTS

JULY - SEPTEMBER 2013

masters class

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EDITOR'S NOTE

In my introduction to this quarter's theme, "Masters Class," which starts on Page 12, I cited a *Philadelphia Inquirer* story about Hugh Campbell, who flummoxed the organizers of a meet at the University of Delaware last month when he broke the world indoor record in 3,000 meters for his age group. His age? Eighty-eight. It was initially thought that they needed to give him a drug test but after some consultation, they let him go home. What's amazing is that Campbell only started running at age 86.

Of course it helps that Campbell got the lottery prize in genetics. His family is long-lived, with two siblings living beyond 100 and other family members thriving up to their 90s. But he also believes that exercise and the right diet have also something to do with it. He plays golf almost everyday since retiring at 60 in 1985. "I like to walk when I play golf, and carry my clubs. That gave me the kind of strength in my legs that kept them in good shape without burning them out."

This and all the other stories featured in this quarter's edition of TAGA *Sports* are intended to remind our readers that age should not hinder one from pursuing a more active and healthier lifestyle. Yes, the bones begin to creak after a certain age and knees are not a limber as they used to be but there are always options for low-impact activities that will not land you in the hospital with a leg cast.

Of course, not everyone featured in this edition are members of the masters category. Roselyn Monroyo's Q&A feature on Sunjoon Tenorio puts the focus on the 12-year-old forward's triumphant performance at the AFC U14 Championship 2014 Qualifiers in Beijing, China in April. ***Story on Page 10***

Contributing writer Catherine Perry introduces us to t'ai chi and the many healthful benefits the body can derive from this most gentle of ancient Chinese martial arts. ***Story on Page 6***

Those wondering what former Saipan resident Dirk Sharer is up to right now would be glad to know that he still manages to keep active while working in Al Ain, United Arab Emirates. Associate editor Mark Rabago managed to catch up with Sharer for a feature on his fondest memories of the islands. ***Story on Page 26***

We hope you enjoy this newest edition of TAGA *Sports* and get inspired to live a more active life, whether it be through triathlon, badminton, soccer, or line dancing. For comments and suggestions, email me at editor@saipantribune.com.

JAYVEE VALLEJERA
Editor

COVER ART
Susy Kindel runs along the parking lot of the Minatchom Atdao Pavilion.

Photography by
ROSELYN MONROYO

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Q&A 10

Sunjoon Tenorio earns a place in CNMI football history at 12.
ROSELYN B. MONROYO

Cultivate your body, mind, and spirit with t'ai chi.

CATHERINE PERRY

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ROSELYN B. MONROYO

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26 Dirk Sharer gets off the treadmill and does the Chicken Dance. MARK RABAGO

WRITERS' BLOC

ROSELYN B. MONROYO
One of Roselyn's biggest fears is getting old. Who does not? She is afraid of the tough change in lifestyle once she hits that stage. However, after finding out how Suzy Kindel and company enjoy life, her worries have somehow been abated.

CATHERINE PERRY
Catherine Perry studying t'ai chi this year and enjoys it both as a cross cultural learning experience and a form of exercise she can continue for a lifetime. It doesn't hurt that practicing t'ai chi and drinking *cha* (tea) by the sea also just makes her feel filthy rich!

MARK RABAGO
Mark just turned 40 years old in April. He tries to stay in shape by playing recreational basketball. In fact, he started playing hoops early mornings at the San Antonio basketball court a couple of Saturdays ago. Mark marvels at the fitness level of the senior athletes he interviewed for this edition of TAGA *Sports*.

Email letters to the editor to editor@saipantribune.com or mail to PMB 34, P.O. Box 10001, Saipan MP 96950. Submissions to TAGA *Sports* must include the writer's name, village address (no P.O. boxes), and daytime phone or mobile number. Letters may be edited for length and clarity and may be published or used in any medium. All submissions become the property of the publication and will not be returned.

JULIE DEARDORFF
Chicago Tribune

As you age, re-balance workout to lessen injury

In her 20s, Lori Popkewitz Alper loved the intense cardio workouts at her Boston gym. But, as her life and her body changed, so did her fitness repertoire.

During pregnancy, Alper found yoga. Soon she was pushing a jog stroller or hauling children in a double-wide bike trailer. Now 47, Alper has returned to some of the high-impact routines of her youth, but her approach has matured.

"I'm more aware of my body's needs, and I try not to be too hard on it," said Alper, who regularly incorporates strength training for bone health and yoga for her sanity. "[Exercise] is such an important piece of my existence—I hope it always will be."

Workout programs are like 401(k)s—they need to be re-balanced over the decades, said fitness expert Tom Holland. "As we age, we need to gradually take out the risk and put in more 'blue chip' elements," he said.

These four basic-yet-effective exercises—a squat, pushup, bicep curl and abdominal crunch—should remain in your program as long as you can perform them correctly, Holland said.

"When you're young, blue chips are often perceived as being too easy, yet they are the key to creating and maintaining a strong foundation," he said. "You may have to modify them slightly as you age—not going down as far on a squat, for example—but you keep them in as long as possible."

As the body ages, it naturally begins to fall apart, with some functions breaking down faster than others. After age 20, the maximal amount of oxygen your body can use—also known as VO2 max—decreases by 1 percent a year in healthy men and women.

By the time you've hit 30, muscular strength begins to head south. But the majority of the decrease occurs after age 50, when it falls at the rate of 15 percent per decade. Bone mineral density also decreases with age; in women the rate accelerates after menopause.

WHAT TO DO...

Experts say the ideal combination of exercise for healthy aging should include a combination of aerobic, strengthening and flexibility exercises.

Balance exercises are also vital in helping prevent falls, which can lead to fractures. And though higher-intensity training programs are effective, less rigorous works can be just as effective, as long as they are done consistently.

Kim Evans, 56, a fitness professional in Grand Haven, Mich., stresses functional fitness and de-emphasizes cardio as her clients age. "Older folks still need to get up and down off of the floor, to be able to chase after grandkids and play a round of golf or tennis without having to recover for several days," she said.

"Aging is not for sissies. You need to face it head on," Evans said. "Pay attention to your limitations, keep up your strength, keep trying new things and have a good attitude."

Tweaking your workout can keep you active well into your golden years. Here's how to reduce the risk in your exercise portfolio:

...IF YOU'RE A RUNNER

Train like a triathlete, Holland said, because if you only run, you'll be forced by injury to switch to swimming and biking to rehabilitate overuse injuries. Swimming is beneficial because "your posture and body weight is horizontal to gravity, so you work many muscles that receive little attention when running or can become weak and prone to injuries, such as the hamstrings, abdominals and low back," said Michele Olson, a professor of exercise physiology at Auburn University at Montgomery, Ala. "Swimming provides a top-notch cardio challenge for heart health; that's important since heart disease risk increases markedly as we age."

Runners don't necessarily need to drop their hard training days, said Amby Burfoot, 66, who plans to run the Boston Marathon in April on the 45th anniversary of his 1968 title. Burfoot isn't running as far or as fast, and he needs more recovery time. But he still runs vigorous hill repeats several times a week and alternates running with easy spinning on a recumbent bike. He eliminated his long runs—his longest is a 13-miler versus the 20-milers of his youth. "I still run marathons but don't race them," he said.

...IF YOU'RE A SWIMMER

Add gravity. Be sure to incorporate strength training, walking or anything weight bearing to help prevent the loss of bone density, said Pete McCall, an exercise physiologist with the American Council on Exercise. Also spend an equal amount of time on your back to help balance out the curves of the spine, recommends Jill Murphy, a physical therapist, licensed athletic trainer and strength and conditioning specialist in Neenah, Wis. Adding some backstroke into the mix "will stretch your pectoral muscles and work the muscles between your shoulder blades that help stabilize your spine and maintain your posture all day long," she said.

...IF YOU'RE A CYCLIST

Run. "Cycling mainly involves the quadriceps muscles while running is primarily a hamstring activity," Holland said. "When either of these muscles is too strong, injury occurs. Combining biking and running keep these muscle groups balanced, which keeps you injury-free." Also try the stationary rower, which doesn't put vertical pressure on the knees, McCall said.

...IF YOU'RE A BODYBUILDER

Try yoga. "Improve your flexibility and provide a static challenge to the muscles versus the dynamic 'pump, pump, pump,' rep after rep you've experienced with a long-term routine of bodybuilding," Olson said.

...IF YOU'RE A TENNIS PLAYER

Balance the other side. "Do resistance training and in the form of dumbbells, bands and tubing to balance the strength on each side of the body," Olson said. "If you are right-handed, most of the joints and muscles on the right side of the body will be better developed than those on the left side. With free weights, each arm has to independently hoist the weight such as shoulder presses with the left side versus the right side."

...IF YOU DON'T WORK OUT

Start moving. "Don't worry about weights, just get up and walk or try something fun like Zumba," McCall said. Start with a form of cardio, such as walking, spinning or using a cardio machine. Adopt a good core-building activity, such a Pilates or use TRX to build a baseline of strength. Holland recommends exercise DVDs. "They're ridiculously inexpensive now, you don't have to leave home to exercise and you can find everything from tai chi to P90X," he said. "And, if you press play enough, they really work."

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T'AI CHI

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ROSELYN B. MONROY/O

Kevin Guolong Wang demonstrates one of the 24 t'ai chi movements during a free weekday session at Micro Beach.

CATHERINE PERRY
TAGA *Sports* Contributing Writer

Clear your mind… Relax you body… Breathe deeply…

With these words from *shifu* (master), you are now ready to begin t'ai chi.

T'ai chi is an ancient form of Chinese martial arts. Founded in Taoism over 2,000 years ago, its precise origins have been lost to history, yet it is still practiced today by an estimated one billion people around the world.

Translated as "supreme ultimate fist," trying to define t'ai chi and its benefits is a moving target as fluid as the motions of t'ai chi itself. Described by some as "moving meditation," t'ai chi is most often practiced as a series of slow-moving martial art forms that flow seamlessly into each other. Its many documented benefits include improved balance, better cardiovascular health, and increased flexibility, motion, and strength. That means fewer falls, lower blood pressure, and less injury and pain. Not bad for an exercise you can perform behind your office desk or while watching television, as some people do.

Clear your mind. One of the most immediate benefits of t'ai chi is reduced stress. As a batter focuses only on the incoming pitch or an archer zeroes in on the bull's eye of a target, a t'ai chi practitioner thinks only of, well, nothing. *Forget yourself.* In the time it takes to complete 24 Form, the most common series of movements, you forget your lengthy "to do" list for today, that thing that happened, and your problems. You think only of the precision of every part of your body moving in unison. In this moment, you quiet the voice inside your head, concerns slip away, and it is only you and the t'ai chi.

Barry Wicksman is licensed by the Shanghai Wushu Association to teach traditional Yang style t'ai chi. He first started learning t'ai chi in the 1970s when he was studying karate in Japan.

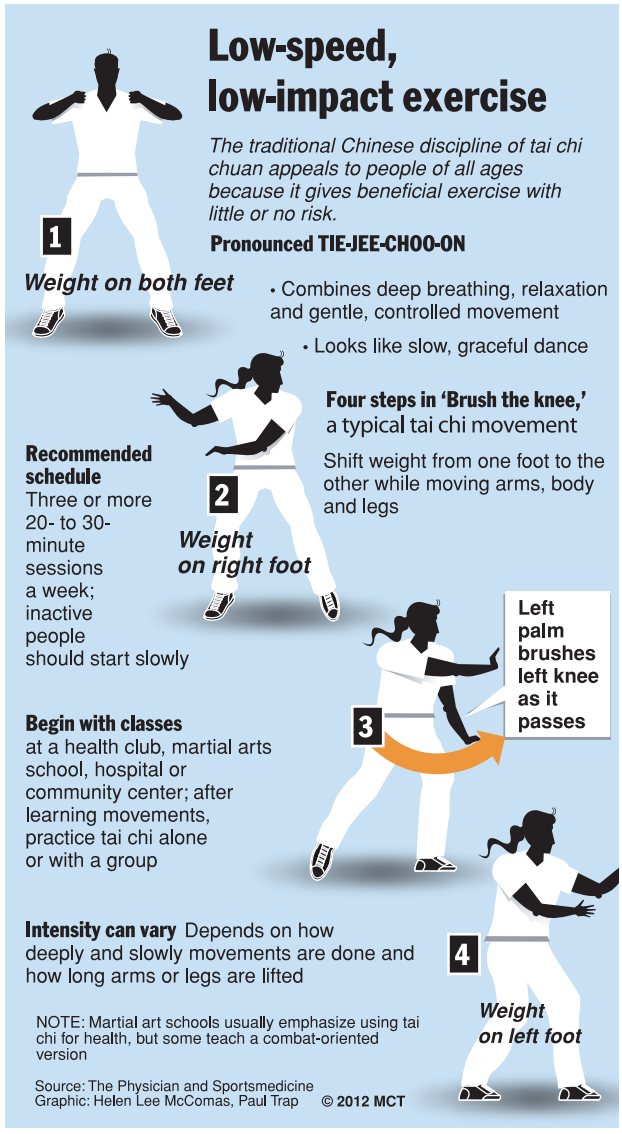
"I remember my karate instructor refer to t'ai chi as the ultimate martial art," said Wickman. "I was fortunate to be introduced to a t'ai chi master living in Tokyo by the name of Chang Yi Chung. He emphasized t'ai chi as a way of life. T'ai chi develops the mind, body and spirit."

Relax your body. Unlike "external" martial arts that emphasize brute force and speed, t'ai chi is an "internal" martial art focused on relaxed leverage and the development of spirit, mind, and *chi* (life force or energy flow). Rather than meeting an incoming attack directly, t'ai chi deflects the force. *Your body should be like ice cream.* In other words, soft and pliable. Unlike the digging grip of an Eagle's Claw, the hand clings to an opponent's body as if holding a basketball…wide, relaxed, and difficult to break away from.

At age 9, Kevin Guolong Wang began a lifelong study of t'ai chi plum flower praying mantis kung fu.

"In t'ai chi, all power and movement is generated from the waist," he explains. When flowing from one form to another, the waist moves first, leading the feet and the arms. When the waist stops moving, so do the other parts of the body. It is only the movement of the waist that brings power to the extremities.

But don't make the error of mistaking softness for weakness. At age 20, Wang was the American boxing champion for his weight class (71 kgs) in his hometown of Harbin, China (pop. 10 million). Does he use t'ai chi principles in his boxing? ➜


Low-speed, low-impact exercise
The traditional Chinese discipline of tai chi chuan appeals to people of all ages because it gives beneficial exercise with little or no risk.
Pronounced TIE-JEE-CHOO-ON
1
Weight on both feet
• Combines deep breathing, relaxation and gentle, controlled movement
• Looks like slow, graceful dance
Four steps in 'Brush the knee,' a typical tai chi movement
Shift weight from one foot to the other while moving arms, body and legs
Recommended schedule
Three or more 20- to 30-minute sessions a week; inactive people should start slowly
2
Weight on right foot
Left palm brushes left knee as it passes
3
Begin with classes
at a health club, martial arts school, hospital or community center; after learning movements, practice tai chi alone or with a group
Intensity can vary Depends on how deeply and slowly movements are done and how long arms or legs are lifted
4
Weight on left foot
NOTE: Martial art schools usually emphasize using tai chi for health, but some teach a combat-oriented version
Source: The Physician and Sportsmedicine
Graphic: Helen Lee McComas, Paul Trap
© 2012 MCT

The slow and coordinated movements of t'ai chi help one relax.

ROSELYN B. MONROYO

"Of course!" he replies. He places his hand against a wall to illustrate his point.

"If I push," he pushes against the wall with his hand, "it's 10 kilograms of pressure."

"But if I don't push," his arm remains rigid as he simply leans the whole weight of his body toward the wall, "it's 70 kilograms of pressure."

Aside from its fighting applications, t'ai chi's other mental and physical benefits can be learned and applied by all ages and are especially beneficial as the body ages.

"Our bodies are like trees…the softer, the better. The old branches of a tree are easily broken. Younger trees can bend, but old people find it harder. The more flexible you are, the better," says Wang.

"T'ai chi is suitable for all, regardless of age," agrees Wicksman. "The older you get, the better your t'ai chi."

Breathe deeply. Breathe through your nose… inhale slowly…and then exhale slowly. But don't just fill your lungs. *Inhale to your abdomen. Inhale to your heels.* What? The benefits of t'ai chi are not limited to mental tranquility and physical agility. Deep breathing during exercise increases blood circulation throughout the body. And yes, hopefully even to the bottom of your feet.

Why is blood circulation so important? In traditional Chinese medicine, proper blood circulation is essential to good health. Good circulation brings oxygen and nutrients to all parts of the body and carries wastes and toxins out. Poor circulation…well, you get the picture.

As a traditional Chinese therapist, Wang also applies t'ai chi principles in his healing practice.

"Everybody, even kids, have imbalances in their bodies. If not corrected, this will probably create health problems later on," he says. "T'ai chi can help. Deep breathing and *chi* push your blood throughout the body."

T'ai chi instruction is offered on Saipan with Wicksman at Gold's Gym and with Wang without charge at American Memorial Park on Wednesday, Friday, and Sunday mornings.

Clear your mind.
Relax your body.
Breathe deeply.
Now you are ready to begin t'ai chi.

What is the H.O.M.E. Visiting Program?

- The H.O.M.E. Visiting Program is an acronym for Healthy Outcomes for Maternal and Early Childhood. The program sets out to improve the health and developmental outcomes for pregnant mothers and infants no older than 3 months of age who reside in at risk communities.

What is the purpose for this program?

- To strengthen the early childhood system in the community and to support families and communities in the development of children who are healthy and ready to learn at school entry. The program wants to also strengthen and enhance initiatives/activities, expand and improve coordination, and assure the provision of comprehensive services for families who reside in at risk communities.

What are the program objectives?

- Promote and maintain positive-child Interaction and family involvement
- Provide and connect families to appropriate resources
- Protect and improve the health, growth and development of every participant served
- Produce and deliver quality service to families in at-risk communities

What Services are provided?

- Prenatal Care
- Well Baby Check Ups
- Update Immunization
- Parent – Child Educational Curriculum
- Referrals
- Transportation

How can I qualify?

- **You are currently pregnant**
- **You have an infant no older than 3 months of age**
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ROSELYN B. MONROYO

Sunjoon Tenorio

ROSELYN B. MONROYO
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

Young gun Sunjoon Tenorio earned a place in CNMI football history at the tender age of 12 after scoring the winning goal in the Commonwealth's celebrated conquest of Guam at the AFC U14 Championship 2014 Qualifiers in Beijing, China in April this year.

Sunjoon, who plays forward, relived that historic feat and expressed his gratitude to the people who helped him become one of the promising youth players of the CNMI.

How did you score the much-talked-about goal in Beijing?

It all started with a big drop kick from Christopher Aninzo with the ball landing near Emmanuel Aniana. When Emmanuel trapped the ball, Guam pressured him right away, but he made a nice "through ball" to Edwin Kim. Edwin then had a nice 360-degree move (called a "Maradona turn") to fake off the Guam player. While he was dribbling near the goal, I wasn't really expecting a pass because I thought Edwin would score, but then he passed it to me. I quickly kicked the ball and it went into the goal. When I celebrate, I usually do what is called the "crane," which I copied from coach Jacky [Lee]. So I did the "crane" and then I was dog-piled by my teammates. After that I ran to coach Jersh Angeles to celebrate with him.

What happened next?

After that goal, we packed up on defense. Guam had some shots but none could get past our awesome goalie, Christopher Aninzo. It was the most intense 22 minutes of the whole soccer tournament. So when the whistle blew and the game was over, we ran to our coaches and celebrated our win over our rivals. We made history. My mind went crazy and I couldn't believe I scored for our team, a historic goal in an international competition and most importantly over Guam.

PERSONAL INFO

Name: Sunjoon Perry Kim Tenorio
Parents: Perry and Teresa Tenorio
Siblings: Airman Justis Tenorio, Private First Class Sunho Tenorio, and Pedro Tenorio
Village: Garapan
School: Whispering Palms

ROSELYN B. MONROYO

After making it to the CNMI U14 Team, what other goals do you have in mind?
To play for the national team in the future. Also, I want to be a professional soccer player.

Is soccer the only sport you play?
Soccer is my first sport but I play baseball too. I started playing when I was 4 years old. My coaches are very encouraging as well as my parents and as time passed I found out I have some skills. As I got better, I enjoyed playing the game more.

What was your first soccer game like? How would you grade your skills when you were just starting?
LOL, I don't even remember. I was 4 years old. I think we all just chased the ball around.

Who were the people who helped you improve your game?
My teammates, my coaches, and most importantly my two older brothers. My teammates always challenge and help me. My coaches push me to my limits and teach me new skills. My brothers, because they have signed up for the most honorable and sacrificial profession: soldiers. They protect and fight for our freedom so people like us can enjoy what we take for granted, including playing sports. Thank you, Justis and Sunho.

Once on the pitch, what goes on in your mind?
Usually, I imagine myself scoring a goal and think what I would do to celebrate if I score. Before and after every game, I just put my mind into soccer and calm myself down.

Players have nicknames. What's yours?
I guess my nickname on the soccer field is "Neymar." I love Neymar da Silva Santos Junior, the Brazilian soccer star who plays for Santos FC. I started wearing my Neymar jersey to practices and players started calling me Neymar. Even coach Jersh Angeles started calling me Neymar. Neymar and I play the same position—forward.

How about your name, what does it mean?
It means that in a land where there are no laws, I will always have morals. My grandmother gave me this name. TS

JAYVEE VALLEJERA
TAGA *Sports* Editor

THE MASTERS CLASS

Hugh Campbell of Wilmington, Del., created a minor furor last month at the University of Delaware when he broke the world indoor race record in 3,000 meters for his age group at the ripe age of 88.

According to a *Philadelphia Inquirer* report, "they got all excited because they found when they had a world-record beater, there was a need for a drug test, and they didn't know what in the world to do about it."

After waiting for nearly an hour as officials huddled, they finally sent him home, concluding that no test was needed. Hugh is sure he would have passed.

"The only pill I take," he says, "is a multivitamin."

The Commonwealth boasts of a lot of athletes but even more remarkable is its large number of athletes who, although they may not fall within Hugh's age group, are just about ready to knock on that age ceiling in a couple more decades. More commonly referred to as the masters category, these athletes of a certain age are giving lie to the truism that being active is only for the young, that athleticism is only for jocks, and that everything is downhill after 40.

This issue of TAGA *Sports* puts a spotlight on these competitive athletes, with the hope that their stories will inspire more people to get off their butts and get moving.

How do vaccines work?

Vaccines fight viruses and bacteria that can make you very sick, disabled, or even kill you.

Bee Wise Immunize

VACCINATION
- Child gets required shots.
- Vaccines build immunity (Immunity means protection from diseases).

IMMUNITY
- Child develops antibodies which act like little soldiers waiting for diseases to enter the body.

EXPOSURE TO DISEASE
- Antibodies attack the disease and kill it.
- CHILD DOES NOT GET SICK.

DPH Immunization Program will begin school vaccinations on April 2013. For your convenience, DPH staff will vaccinate your child at school. If your child has received a notice of delinquency, please sign the consent form so that we may give your child the protection from crippling vaccine preventable diseases.

The more children that are immunized will increase the net of protection around our community.

The wider the net of protection, the less chances of our children and members of our community getting sick.

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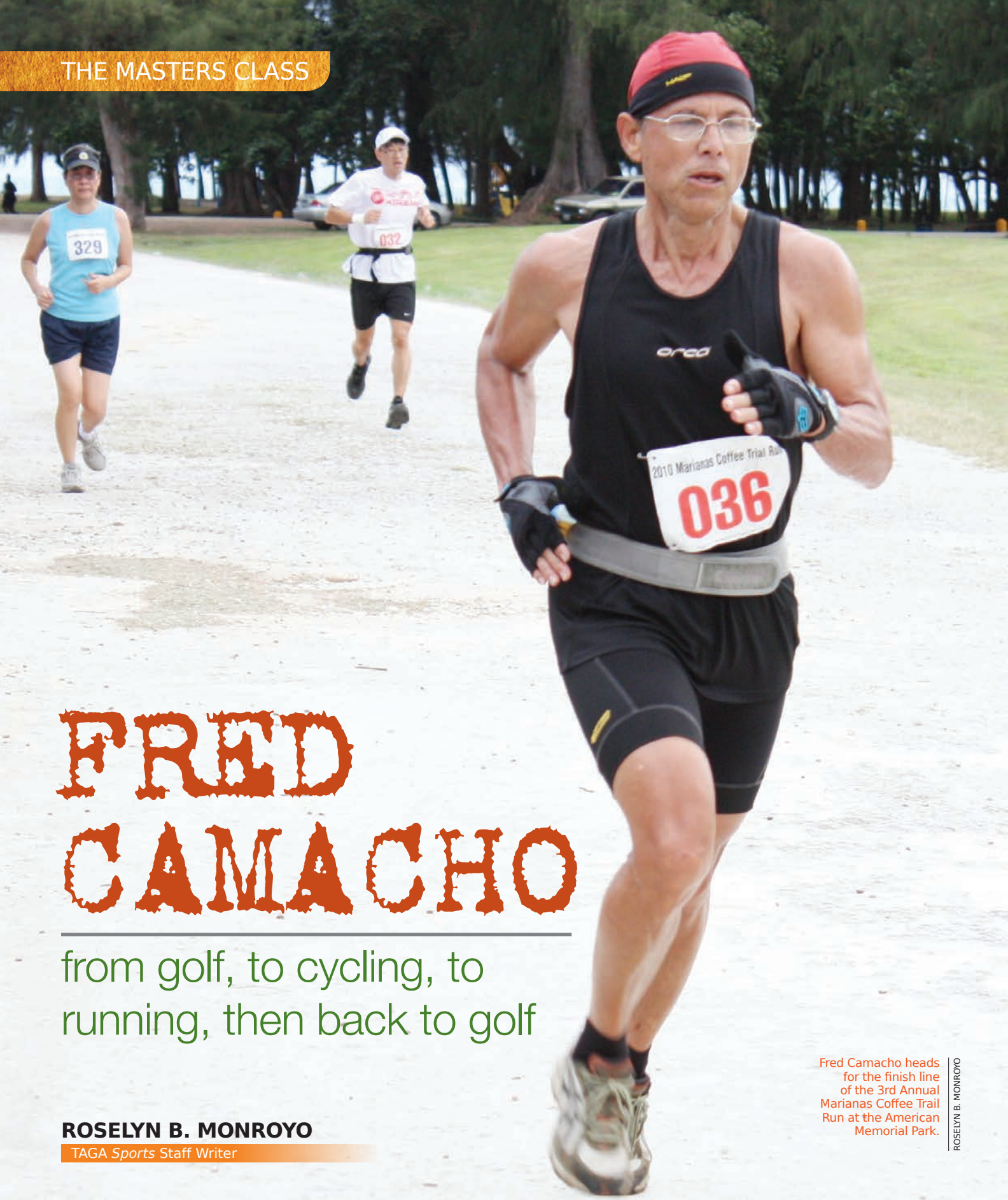

FRED CAMACHO

from golf, to cycling, to running, then back to golf

Fred Camacho heads for the finish line of the 3rd Annual Marianas Coffee Trail Run at the American Memorial Park.

ROSELYN B. MONROYO

ROSELYN B. MONROYO
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

Fred Camacho, right, joins a group of bikers heading down Capital Hill during the 2012 Hell of the Marianas Century Cycle Race.

ROSELYN B. MONROYO

Doctor's order to golfer Fred Camacho: Do more strenuous exercises.

So he started running, then added cycling, and soon got into triathlon. What began as a way to lower his cholesterol count became a passion.

"My biking and running evolved from a rather unusual circumstance. One day, I had an annual physical examination with Dr. Tony Stearns and it included a cholesterol count. Dr. Stearns may not remember it but I vividly recalled when he asked me what sporting activity I am currently involved in. Without hesitation, I responded golf. He looked directly at me with such a serious tone in his voice and said I need a more strenuous exercise than golf to lower my cholesterol count. That was the beginning. I was about 46 years old and decided to start walking and jogging," said Camacho.

"I did this routine for several months until I was able to run longer and more consistently. The American Memorial Park's walking pavement was my training ground. …I developed such a passion for running I was doing it not only for my health but for fun as well. I also started reading about running and cycling to better understand the sports."

From the AMP grounds, Camacho moved to going around the island, joining bike and running races. He was one of the few local athletes to do both the inaugural Hell of Marianas (100-kilometer cycling race) in 2007 and the Saipan Marathon in 2005.

Ankle problems almost prevented him from completing the 42-kilometer run, but thanks to running partner Joshua Berger and his pride, he soldiered on and still finished ahead of several runners.

"Joshua Berger slowed down on his half-marathon race to run my pace and encouraged me to press on. He did this for most of the second half and to this day we sometimes joke about how badly I looked at the finish line. It was not memorable, but it was a feat I wanted to accomplish. I am also fortunate to be able to complete, in decent time, the first Hell of the Marianas and improved my time the following year," he said.

Slowing down, but not giving up

Camacho has not been running for a little over a year now due to a heel injury but also rediscovered his love for golf to keep him going.

"I have been playing golf for well over 15 years. But when I started running and biking and got hooked into doing triathlons, golfing was put on hold. Now I am always looking forward to be at the golf course with the hope of playing more often in the next few years," the Kagman resident said.

His Sunday afternoons are allotted for golf, while Friday, Saturday, and Sunday mornings are for training and fun rides. When there are major races (Hell of the Marianas and Tagaman), he adds two days to his training sessions and watch what he eats. These have been part of his routine and at 62 he has no plan of stopping.

"I enjoy the sports I do and am thankful and hopeful that I may continue for a few more years. The secret, if you can call it that, is to maintain the perseverance and not slack off, especially if you are not as young. Also, listen to your body. You know it best and you are the best judge on when to push on and when to slow down. I am slowing down but not giving up," the bank executive said.

"Time does not wait for anyone. Start now and start easy at a pace you are comfortable. Find a partner or join a group so that you will not be discouraged doing it alone. As long as you have realistic expectation with the ultimate goal of having fun, by all means go for it. I encourage everyone, especially those over 50 to try out the different sports because you will find yourself wanting to do it more and more."

discovering saipan's beauty through sports

ROSELYN B. MONROYO
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

SUZY KINDEL

Suzanne "Suzy" Kindel is a retiree and spends her retirement days exploring the beauty of Saipan through running and swimming.

"Saipan is a great location for so many sports. Marpi is the best place for running, swimming, and biking because of the beauty and limited traffic and lack of boats at PauPau. There is a variety of courses, including numerous trails. A runner can do a short run or easily run a half marathon, choosing either a flat or hilly course or a combination. There is always a nice breeze out there and often shade," the Sadog Tasi resident said.

At 61, she is a veteran of running races on Saipan, first picking up a pair of sneakers more than a decade ago not only to stay in shape but to spend time with friends.

"I started running in 1997 because of my friends here who would run together. I like running's social aspect. I typically run early Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday mornings, with Saturday being a long run with a group of runners. Tuesdays generally is a shorter but faster run while on Thursdays I do a hill run. I run in Marpi two to three times a week and love going out there. I just hope Marpi can be preserved for the benefit of our island's athletes and recreational walkers."

Kindel also sets aside three days a week for swimming at the 50-meter Kan Pacific Swimming Pool and does open water swims either at PauPau or in the waters near Saipan World Resort in Susupe, where one can use partially submerged World War II tanks as markers.

She debuted in the Escape from Managaha in 2010 and since then has made repeated crossing from the famous island to Micro Beach. She celebrated her birthday last year with a 3.5-kilometer swim from Paupau to Tanapag, enjoying Saipan's pristine waters with current and former Saipan Swin Club swimmers.

At the end of these ocean swims, Kindel and her fellow swimmers would often exchange stories about the beautiful creatures they see along the course.

It is through swimming that Kindel relives the things she enjoyed doing in high school.

"I did recreational swimming during summer and synchronized swimming in high school. I started swimming more seriously once I moved to Saipan in 1989 because of the wonderful lagoon and the availability of the 50-meter pool in a beau-

ROSELYN B. MONROYO

Suzy Kindel, right, gets a high-five from Paul Plunkett as she emerges from the water during the 2013 SSC Annual Meek & Mighty Ocean Swim at the Pacific Islands Club.

tiful and convenient location," Kindel said.

The breathtaking lagoon is also why she is keen to try a new sport—stand up paddling.

"I am interested in stand up paddling because it would allow me to be on our lagoon. Saipan offers something that is rare: a protected lagoon with limited boat traffic, great visibility, and warm water," said Kindel.

As if those activities aren't enough, Kindel also does Pilates one hour a day, six times a week.

Choosing a sport or activity that will help individuals in her age group stay in shape may be tough, but Kindel advised her fellow sexagenarians to go for it.

"Just try it. Find a friend who is also interested and make the time to participate together. Use this time as your social time and find a mentor who is willing to teach you about the sport."

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MANNY SITCHON

CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS

Fifty-five-year-old Manny Sitchon nears the finish line of the 2011 XTERRA Saipan at the American Memorial Park. Sitchon has dominated his age group in both the Tagaman Triathlon and XTERRA Saipan Championship. Other photo shows Sitchon in action in the bike course of a recent XTERRA Saipan Championship.

ROLL OF HONORS

XTERRA SAIPAN CHAMPIONSHIP

- 1st place, 45-49 age group 2005 XTERRA Sports triathlon
- 1st place 50-54 age group 2008 XTERRA Saipan Championship Triathlon (Qualified to Hawaii XTERRA World Championship)
- 2nd place 50-54 age group 2009 XTERRA Saipan Championship Triathlon
- 1st place 55-59 age group 2013 XTERRA Saipan Championship Triathlon (Qualified to Hawaii XTERRA World Championship)

TAGAMAN TRIATHLONS

- Tagaman Triathlon finisher from year 2000 to 2013 (except 2004)
- 2nd place finish, 50-54 age group in 2010

SAIPAN OCEAN SWIM COMPETITION

- 1st place 45-49 grp, 1.5km ocean swim in 2006
- 1st place 45-49, 1.5km ocean swim in 2007
- 1st place 50-54, 5km ocean swim in 2008
- 2nd place 50-54, 1.5km ocean swim in 2009
- 2nd place 55-59, 3km ocean swim in 2013

OTHER EVENTS

- 5-time finisher of Escape from Managaha annual swim competition
- 3-time finisher of Hell of Marianas Century Cycle Competition
- 4-time finisher of Rota Blue Triathlon
- Multiple finisher of Saipan Sports Festival 20K run

getting to the finish line counts best

MARK RABAGO
TAGA *Sports* Associate Editor

For Manny Sitchon, sports is not merely a weekend hobby—it's a lifestyle.

The 55-year-old multiple XTERRA Saipan and Tagaman Triathlon age group champion literally eats, sleeps, and breathes triathlon and other sports that happen to catch his fancy.

For instance when he is training for an upcoming triathlon, Sitchon's workday is not complete without a 30- to 45-minute swim to the two World War II Sherman tanks just off the Saipan World Resort beach in Susupe.

He does this three to four times a week during his lunch break, on top of waking up as early as 4am to stretch his legs and run or doing it after work at 6pm.

The IBSS office automation service supervisor devotes his weekends to training for his long run and two-to-three-hour mountain or road bike training for early Saturday and early Sunday, respectively.

"Finishing a triathlon is kind of an experience that is so gratifying. After all those hard work you've exhausted, finally it is paying off as you see and approach the finish line. The challenge of overcoming adversity and defying the call of your body to admit defeat when all your strength is already depleted is done. You are competing against yourself. It is the kind of sport where you are on your own when you go out to race and no teammates to rely on," he said.

Sitchon believes consistent training is one of the key factors to achieving something in any sporting endeavor.

"I do not pressure myself to win in any age group event that I participate in. I always see to it that I just go out and enjoy whatever sporting activity I'm involved in. My primary concern in every race is to reach the finish line. Getting an award is just secondary. By finishing a race, you already rewarded yourself with a healthy body and I think that is more than enough. Always remember to finish a race, no matter how slow you finish. Besides, the last runner/participant always receives the loudest claps and cheers."

He also attests to the importance of cross training and its importance in maintaining healthy muscles and bones.

"There is a certain age that whenever a person reaches, no doubt muscle and bone structures begin to deteriorate and I think cross training is one of the proper ways to evenly distribute stresses on our body."

It does come in handy that Sitchon takes part in a sport that is multi-disciplinary, allowing him to work all and different parts of his body.

"Regular exercise and love for sports is the best way to keep fit and trim. Triathlon is a type of multi-sport training that is helpful in keeping our body trim and fit since we do three activities in one sport," he said.

Practicing what he preaches, Sitchon is a member of the two-time defending champion team in the 50-and-over masters basketball league and is one of the referees under the umbrella of the Basketball Association of the Northern Mariana Islands. He also takes part in almost every cycling, running, and masters swimming event on island.

Sitchon admits that changing to a more healthy diet was one of the biggest challenges he had to overcome as a senior athlete. It also took a bout with high-blood pressure for him to completely rethink what he eats.

"I used to have a notion that I can eat anything as I am a very active and athletic person. That perception changed abruptly when I was diagnosed with high blood pressure nine years ago and I was shocked to learn about it. However, I came to understand my situation as both of my parents do have the condition."

For a month, Sitchon took medicines to lower his high blood pressure, until making a compromise with himself and his doctor that he will change his lifestyle and diet.

"With my doctor's approval and with the help of my sport interests, I was able to lower my high-blood pressure by a considerable range. Since then I haven't taken any medication," he said proudly.

Sitchon's first love in sports was basketball until he got into competitive running while working for the Arabian American Oil Co. in Saudi Arabia in the '80s.

He came to Saipan in 1999 where he watched and cheered his first Tagaman Triathlon event. Before long, he was training for his first triathlon and in 2000 made his debut in the local triathlon scene.

With several dozen age groups championships in the sport, including a couple of qualifying invites to the XTERRA World Championship in Maui, and at a still youthful age of 55, Sitchon admits he's done everything he could possibly achieve in triathlon.

"I now feel more comfortable belonging to the 55-59 age group category. I feel fortunate as up to now I can still compete and participate in some sports events and I owe these things to my consistent training."

Sitchon said that sports or any physical activity should be an essential part of everyone's lifestyle, whatever type of sport that may be.

If possible, start getting into sports at an early age and explore numerous types. Having more options during one's younger years, he said, translates into a wider variety of sport activity to choose from when one grows older. Triathlon is a very good example of a multi-sport activity that is beneficial to seniors.

"Here on Saipan, we are fortunate to have a friendly group of triathletes/athletes while at the same time everything is accessible. We have the ocean, flat, smooth, and hilly roads, mountains for trail or off-road biking, swimming clubs, biking groups, bike shops, etc. It is just a matter of choice."

Professional triathlete Renata Bucher of Switzerland, left, stares at barefoot runner Chang Whan Jang as they cruise down Beach Road during the 2010 XTERRA Saipan Championship.

ROSELYN B. MONROYO

CHANG WHAN JANG

the barefoot runner

ROSELYN MONROYO
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

ROSELYN B. MONROYO

Chang Wang Jang, right, enjoys running up Mt. Tapochao with fellow barefoot runner Daniel Han during the 2012 Annual Turkey Trot Fun Run.

Pro triathlete Renata Bucher was speeding along Beach Road for the run leg of the Tagaman Triathlon when an unusual sight caught her eye and forced her to slow down: A man about twice her age was running barefoot on the scorching concrete road and was keeping up with her.

Meet Chang Whan Jang, or Mr. Jang, as he is more popularly known on Saipan. He runs barefoot not only on flat courses but also even along the unforgiving rough road going up Mt. Tapochao.

He also plays tennis. On bare feet, too.

At 61, running and playing tennis are still part of his daily routine.

"I feel like I am still a teenager because I won't go home without doing outdoor sports or any physical activities. I usually go to AMP tennis court or AMP jogging pathway, but the track at the Oleai Sport Complex is my favorite place. It's like a second home to me. I go there to warm up and train whenever there is a big race because it is very convenient for checking exact lap time and having water supply. You can also practice safely at night," said Jang, who also coaches runners at Hopwood Junior High School.

This sexagenarian is so active that winning in competitions is no longer an issue; it's explaining it to his family why he has to be out all the time that is.

"Sometimes my family finds it hard to understand what I do and love best [being active in sports]. Probably, because I do many things," the grandfather of two admitted. "I don't know what the exact benefits I get from doing these sports, but they make me feel great and enjoy a simple lifestyle. I am having fun with nature and people."

Pioneer

Mr. Jang has been running on Saipan for about three decades now. Early this year he was honored for consistently competing in the run leg of the Tagaman Triathlon since 1988.

"I have wonderful memories [of] the first Tagaman on March 15, 1988, with over 350 Japanese athletes. Also, I had a lot of fun with my Korean friend marathoners and their families in the first Saipan Marathon in 2006. It was another exciting moment because I finished third overall with a time of 3 hours and 30 minutes. Every year, I can't help but look forward to [March], the Sportsfest Month, because I can meet and have fun with a lot of my old running friends who have been coming here for over two decades."

Jang was into various sports when he was still in South Korea and sustained that passion when he came to Saipan in the early '80s.

"I started playing sports for fun in middle school. I continued playing in high school and college in Korea. I played soccer barefoot, basketball, and volleyball and was also into running and taekwondo because we didn't have any other choices for fun at that time," the Seoul native said.

He came to Saipan in May 1980 and the island's pristine beauty and safe environment inspired him to continue running.

Mr. Jang used to run 10 miles back and forth between Garapan and the former Nikko Hotel for many years. He then joined the first MVA Half Marathon in January 1982 where he placed second overall with a time of 1 hour and 24 minutes. Mr. Jang also competed in Guam, Rota, Tinian, and Korea.

" I set a personal record time (3:12:00) in the Korea Chun Chen International Marathon in October 2011 when I was 49 years old or 19 years after my first marathon in Guam (3:15:00)," said the Gualo Rai resident.

Philosophy

A couple of years ago, after taking part in a race going up Mt. Tapochao, Mr. Jang showed me his feet and I was surprised to see that the sharp rocks on the road seemed to have had no effect on him; he only had minor scrapes.

"No, pain," a smiling Mr. Jang said.

He used to wear shoes on and off while running but became focused on barefoot running after getting injured in the summer of 2006 and being inspired by the book *Born to Run*, a national bestseller from runner and author Christopher McDougall, who told about members of the Tarahumara Indian tribe in the Mexican Copper Canyons running long distances at blistering speeds.

"I twisted my right knee seriously in 2006 during soccer practice at AMP. It was very painful, my right knee felt uncomfortable, and I could hardly run more than 10 kilometers. After that I tried running barefoot and it worked. No pain," he said.

"Running barefoot helps keep my body balance. My right leg muscle is a little bit thicker and heavier than my left leg as I had casting on my left leg for over 10 months after a bad car accident in May 1988. Running and playing tennis barefoot also makes me feel like I am in touch with Mother Nature. Barefoot running improves your balance, strength, posture, and flexibility. I hope everybody can experience the mysterious functions of our body when running barefoot."

If there's another sport he would like to try, it's mountain bike racing because, as he says, he loves to enjoy the natural beauty of Saipan.

Still barefoot?

Definitely.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

BUDHI GURUNG

Veteran paddler Budhi Gurung poses with the medals he won in the 2006 Micronesian Games on Saipan.

MARK RABAGO
TAGA *Sports* Associate Editor

Besides playing his favorite sport of table tennis and doing a host of other physical activities, Budhi Gurung has also one unusual habit that he believes strengthens his immune system: He never—and he means never—drinks water during or before a meal.

"One hour after lunch or dinner, that really helps the digestive system," he said. "I have been doing that for the past 15 years and by the grace of God, I never get sick, plus I don't take any medicine."

He believes in water therapy, though, and drinks at least two glasses of water early in the morning as soon as he get ups—and no tea, coffee, or breakfast for at least an hour.

This atypical routine seems to work for Gurung, a veteran ping-pong player whose claim to CNMI sporting fame is winning a boatful of medals for the islands in various regional events.

The Sablan Topline Company staff has so far bagged two gold, two silver, and three bronze medals while representing the Commonwealth in the 2005 South Pacific Mini Games in Palau, 2005 Micronesian Games on Saipan, and 2010 Micronesian Games in Palau.

This is on top of winning dozens of championships for ping-pong on island and during the occasional goodwill tournaments against Tinian and its crack Tinian Dynasty Hotel & Casino table tennis club.

When asked about his secret to keeping himself fit and playing table tennis competitively despite being already 57 years old, Gurung said that age has nothing to do with sports as long as one is active.

"In order to be active, we are required to do aerobic exercises at least for 30 minutes, four times in a week such as brisk walking, jogging, or running and I have been jogging regularly plus I do practice ping-pong also," he said in an interview with *TAGA Sports*.

Gurung also said he doesn't smoke and makes it a point to eat vegetables everyday.

Staying fit and keeping healthy is in everybody's hands, says the Nepalese native, who also champions the health benefits of simple brisk walking.

"Best exercise and one of the most popular exercises in every part of the world is walking. Walking 100 steps per minute is the standard and walking briskly for at least 45 minutes everyday is a great exercise. It does not cost too much. Just a good pair of shoes is good enough to start. It's best to jog at least for five minutes after brisk walking but do not forget to stretch your body first, warm up for at least 10 minutes before we start and we have to do the same after exercises also. It's never too late to start so let us get started," he advised.

Table tennis obviously plays a big part in Gurung's healthy lifestyle and he says the sports he considers the "largest and fastest net sport in the world" is an amazing stress-reliever.

"We have to make very quick decision before the tiny ball flies back to us so we know how to return, block, or make a topspin. I forget everything while focusing on the tiniest and lightest ball (2.5 grams) in sports. For me, ping-pong is a great workout. We have to be very active physically, mentally, and especially have good eyesight because of the ball speed."

Gurung first played the sport when he was 15 and, through sheer persistence and practice, became a champion when he was 18 while working in India.

There was a long lull after that championship due to marriage, having children, and

getting fit one swing of a paddle at a time

returning to his native Kathmandu, Nepal.

He started to play the sport again to keep himself fit, practicing thrice a week. In 1995, he played in the masters category of the All Nepal Table Tennis Championship and took home a bronze medal.

As well as ping-pong, Gurung also played cricket, soccer, badminton, tennis, volleyball, and basketball in his youth.

He arrived on Saipan in 1997 to work as a team leader at Hyatt Regency Saipan. He worked at the Garapan landmark for six years before moving to Sablan Topline in 2003 as laundry supervisor after Hyatt Regency outsourced its laundry services.

Gurung has three daughters, with the eldest taking her MBA in New York. His second daughter is studying for a doctorate in neuroscience at the University of Oklahoma, while the youngest recently finished her hotel management course in culinary arts in Nepal and is planning to go to the U.S. sometime in August. Gurung's wife recently retired as a team leader from a five- star hotel in Kathmandu.

He may be adding on in years, but Gurung remains young at heart and in body.

"It's not the age that decides our youthfulness—it's your inner feeling that makes you feel young or old." TG

PLAUDITS FOR BUDHI

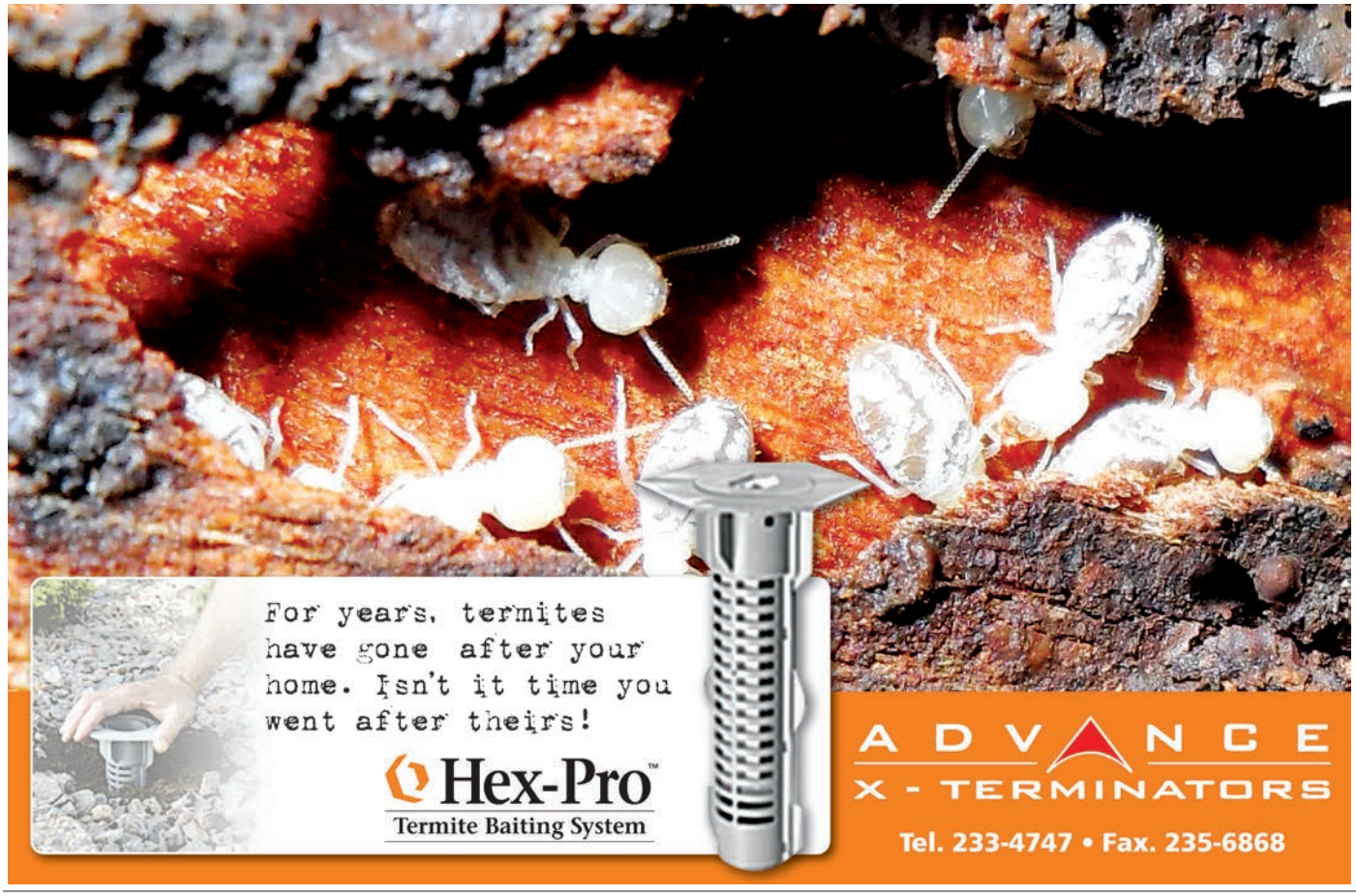
"You could consider Budhi a master of the sport. Being born and raised in Nepal gave Budhi a good situation to build the foundation for his physical condition into his older age. He has shared stories about walking kilometers at a time over mountainous terrain as he grew up in a village in Nepal.

"In his later years, Budhi has been conscious of his physical fitness level, and this certainly translates well into outcomes of table tennis competition. Table tennis is considered a 'cradle to the grave' kind of sport, where a lady from Australia still regularly joins the World Veterans Table Tennis Championships up to her age of over 100 right now (the competition is age-bracketed). I have heard of stories where excellent young athletes are "humiliated" when they end up losing to senior citizens.

"Table tennis is conducive to allowing players from different age groups play with each other. It is not the physical qualities of the athlete that are paramount in the sport. The technical and mental dimensions are equally important, which can be honed through years of experience. There have been a lot of good table tennis players who stopped trying to excel in their sport in their middle years; Budhi is definitely not such a person.

"Budhi's commitment to the game leads him to still observe other high-level and professional players, made much easier in the Internet age. He tells me he will see something in a world-class player's technique that he liked and would copy and practice the technique to incorporate into his own game. He hasn't stopped learning, so to speak, and that is certainly commitment to the game."

— MATTA president Steve Lim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ROSELYN B. MONROYO

HANNAH CHOI

regaining her winning ways

ROSELYN B. MONROYO
TAGA *Sports* Staff Writer

Saipan Badminton Club's Hannah Choi makes a return during her and Sam Jones' doubles game against the Berks Blazers' Ferdie Arago and Lani Bartolome in the 2012 Traders Insurance Team Tournament at the TSL Sports Complex.

Hannah Choi is a perennial winner in local badminton tournaments, showing little or no signs of a player who once stopped hitting a shuttlecock for nearly 30 years.

"I started playing badminton again about five years ago after I felt my body was getting weak and realized I need to go out and play some sports," said the 56-year-old member of Saipan Badminton Club.

> "By getting back to the fundamentals of badminton, I manage to lessen my mistakes during tournaments."

With Choi around, SBC has dominated the Northern Marianas Badminton Association's team tournament for the past two years. The Chinatown resident also clinched several singles championships, beating players twice or even thrice her age.

Her success in badminton is not surprising as she played the sport when she was still in school. Choi suited up for her junior high and high school teams and competed in regional tournaments in Korea. She had her share of victories in regional and school competitions and her passion for badminton convinced her to study physical education in college.

Choi also played badminton in the collegiate ranks but called it quits after graduation, as she began to get involved in missionary work that eventually brought her and her family to Saipan. She did not resume playing badminton until she was 52.

"When I started playing again, I can feel the good changes in my body. Badminton is a very good sport because it is like an aerobic exercise and you do not need to worry about the heat from the sun," Choi said.

Besides getting back her winning form, Choi also thanks badminton for introducing her to new friends from other countries and learning about their culture.

As for her secret to winning one tournament after another, Choi said every time she goes to the court two or three times a week, she focuses on practicing the basics instead of playing long games to improve her skill.

"By getting back to the fundamentals of badminton, I manage to lessen my mistakes during tournaments," said Choi.

She is also into table tennis, lawn tennis, and bowling, and wants to pass on that love for sports to her only child, Yong Jun Choi.

"My son plays a lot of sports, too. He is into soccer, bowling, swimming, cycling, and basketball. He was the captain of the GCA (Grace Christian Academy) basketball team that won the high school division title in the private school league."

too fit to quit

Roy Pangelinan hits a baseline return during his and Bobby Cruz's match against Richard Asuncion and Ronnie Lacbayo in the men's open doubles division of the 4th Annual Tan Holdings Tennis Classic held last year at the AMP tennis courts.

ROSELYN B. MONROYO

ROY PANGELINAN

MARK RABAGO
TAGA *Sports* Associate Editor

Roy Pangelinan credits good genes and his active lifestyle for keeping himself fit, which in turn allows him to continue to enjoy his favorite sport, tennis.

At an age when his contemporaries have traded in their racquets for golf clubs, the 47-year-old Papago resident still serves and volleys with the best of them at the American Memorial Park tennis courts.

"I like the sport because it's good for exercise and I get to meet new good players, socialize, and I really enjoy playing tennis. I keep myself relatively in good shape by playing at least four times a week. I guess it's also my physical makeup," the 5'7", 160-lb. Pangelinan told TAGA *Sports*.

He picked up the sport during his high school years when he would make a beeline to the Civic Center tennis courts and play tennis with just about anyone who would play with a skinny 15-year-old kid who was oddly not into softball or baseball, at the time the island's favorite pastime.

Pangelinan took no formal tennis lessons and learned the sport by observing other players and watching TV.

"I did not take any private lessons. I developed my own tennis skills," he said.

Some of the players he swung racquets with in the '80s were the likes of Nikko Molokai, Frances and Luis Chong, Donald Barinas, and a big Carolinian guy simply known as Typhoon.

Some of the tennis players he idolized growing up included American sports icons like John McEnroe and Jimmy Connors.

After graduating from Marianas High School in 1984, Pangelinan would matriculate at the Oregon Institute of Technology. He would eventually transfer to the University of Guam where he finished criminal justice.

He returned to Saipan after college and worked for the Department of Public Safety as a police office before resigning two years later in 1993.

Shortly after, Pangelinan entered the property management business and, to this day, personally looks after a number of properties and apartments on island.

Like tennis, his job requires a lot of grunt work and running around and that's OK with Pangelinan as his daily routine of yard and maintenance work keeps him active.

In the end, all these physical activities translate to him being able to move better in the tennis court, contributing to more than a dozen championships in the old FILATA, Saipan Tennis Association, and the Northern Mariana Islands Tennis Association.

Hands down, the tennis game that sticks out the most in his more than 30-year love affair with the sport was the time he and longtime tennis doubles partner Dino Jones went down to Guam in the mid-2000s and played in a tournament there.

"He had leg cramps and I had stomach cramps, but we somehow made it into the championship round against players half our age before settling for second place."

Pangelinan also cites a 4.0 event in Guam that he and another all-time great, Eli Buenaventura, won a couple of years later.

His advice for 40-or-somethings who want to get into tennis is to take private lessons first.

"At least to learn the basics like forehand, backhand, serve, lob, and volley. They should also have patience, practice a lot, focus, and they must really love the sport. If you don't enjoy it, you won't last long. A lot of players in the 40s feel pain and some would change their sport like into golf. So far I'm OK and I still play tennis."

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

MARK RABAGO

DIRK SHARER

Getting off the treadmill and doing the Chicken Dance

MARK RABAGO
TAGA *Sports* Associate Editor

Former Saipan resident Dirk Sharer won a bronze medal in triathlon during the 2003 South Pacific Mini Games in Suva, Fiji. However, it was not the podium ceremony with the rest of Team CNMI that is seared into his memory; it was the impromptu and hilarious Chicken Dance that came after it.

"We had a healthy dose of fun along the way and surprised ourselves when we won a team bronze. The most amusing moment was after the award ceremony when Peter [Sinclair] and Stephan [Samoyloff] led all those that gathered in an impromptu rendition of the Chicken Dance. Photos of this still survive. Jeff Race and Tyce Mister likely have some of the incriminating evidence, too. In hindsight, the best result is that we still communicate and swap stories with each other after all the years," Sharer told TAGA *Sports* in an email from the United Arab Emirates, where he is now based.

There's no denying that the 2003 Pacific Games is the highlight of the Wisconsin-born and lifelong Milwaukee Bucks fan's sports career.

"My biggest sports accomplishment was joining some quality and ever encouraging teammates and coaches in the triathlon competition for the 2003 South Pacific Games in Fiji," said the former business consultant of the NMC Small Business Development Center.

Joining Sharer in the CNMI national tri-

athlon team in the 2003 SPG were husband-and-wife Peter and Kathryn Sinclair, Stephan Samoyloff, Anneka Sakovich, and Vanessa Ince.

Sharer also tips his hat to the team's coach, Jeannie Sakovich, and family and supporters that egged the team on as they trained for the Suva Games.

"Jeannie was a wonderful mentor and coach to our team and the outside support from spouses—thanks for all the morning bake snacks at the pool, Deena [Samoyloff]—training partners (too many to mention), and workmates (who picked up the slack while we were training) was a big positive."

Becoming an athlete

Sharer first came to Saipan in August 1997 after deciding he had had enough of life's treadmill that is the USA.

The wheels came off that treadmill via a rude welcome upon his arrival in the tropics: two successive typhoons that severely tested his patience and potential adaptability to the Pacific Islands.

"Friends made within those two months, and that I still maintain to this day greatly helped me through those trying times."

Before coming to Saipan, Sharer was not much of the sporty type, much less a triathlete that would one day bring home a bronze medal.

"My parents never bestowed big shoulders or much height to my physical frame so I dabbled in basketball and not much else. Over time, immediate family members began facing serious health issues such as heart attacks brought on by heavy central European diets that were a part of my life for many years. So my brother, three years younger than myself, started jogging to avoid the same fate."

Before long he and his younger brother entered a few short running races and then decided to enter a marathon with the goal of qualifying for and running the Boston Marathon.

"We ended up doing so and I brought my interest in running to Saipan. After relocating here I met a few friends and started running with them periodically and over time, gravitated to additional interests that included swimming and cycling," he said.

Swimming was a particular challenge since he hadn't had any coaching and was an admitted inept in the water.

Over time and with some patient guidance from the Sakoviches—Jeannie and fellow NMASA Sports Hall of Famer Bill—and former Saipan Swim Club coach Mike Stewart, it eventually became an activity that Sharer would enjoy and still enjoy to this day.

Greener pastures

In 2006, Sharer left Saipan, a place he has come to regard as his second home, for greener pastures. At the time, the CNMI was reeling from an economic crisis and periodic power interruptions have become the norm.

After a short stint in China, Sharer moved to Al Ain, United Arab Emirates, where he is currently part of the business faculty with the Higher Colleges of Technology.

Surprisingly, he has found himself reunited with a few Saipan transplants in the UAE, including Agnes McGrath, Dr. Leon Hart, David Rumptz, and Rik Villegas. "I manage to see them on an irregular basis and Saipan always comes up in conversations."

To feed his appetite for sports activities, Sharer has found a core group of expats and local Emirati guys that he runs, swims, and cycles with, but not to the extent that he did on Saipan, which somehow probably made him less fit.

"As a longtime Saipan swim colleague said to me upon my return for a week last summer, 'you've filled out a bit.' A hard pill to swallow, but coming from a friend it made the blow somewhat more manageable."

What he misses most about Saipan are everyone he met and became friends with in the close to a decade that he lived on the island.

"The friendships shared and getting together on short notice to swim in the lagoon, for instance, are really missed. But the best outcome is that they endure. For example, Jim Benedetto was passing through Dubai for a conference and Agnes, Dr. Leon, and myself got together near the Burj Khalifa and shared a good dinner and memories of life on Saipan. Moreover, the majority of friendships made on Saipan have endured over the years and that's the high watermark of my time spent there."

LEFT PHOTO: The CNMI national triathlon team and other members of the CNMI delegation perform an impromptu Chicken Dance after Dirk Sharer (partly hidden), Stephan Samoyloff, and Anneka Sakovich finished with a bronze medal at the 2003 South Pacific Mini Games in Suva, Fiji. **THIS PAGE:** Former Saipan resident Dirk Sharer, standing second from right, poses with friends and fellow cyclist after a recent race in the United Arab Emirates where he is now based.

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SPORTS CALENDAR

JULY

27th Summer Universiade – The CNMI's Clay McCullough-Stearns and John Nekaifes will join the beach volleyball competition of this biennial event that will be held in Kazan, Russia.

Asia Pacific Little League Regional Championships – This baseball tournament will be held in Clark Field, Pampanga in the Philippines with the CNMI competing in the Major, Junior, Senior, and Big League divisions against teams from the host country, Guam, New Zealand, Chinese-Taipei, China, Hong Kong, Korea, and other nations in Asia.

2013 Oceania Marathon and Half Marathon Championships – Long distance runner Michael Mancao will represent the CNMI in this annual event to be held in Gold Coast, Australia.

AUGUST

2013 IAAF World Championships – This year, the annual athletics competition will be held in Moscow, Russia with Jesus Iguel representing the CNMI.

2013 Pacific Oceania Junior Championships – This annual tennis tournament features CNMI players representing the North Pacific Team and joining forces with Guam, Palau, and FSM bets in battling the East and West squads in the region. The competition will be held in Fiji.

2013 Tournament of Champions – As the name suggest, this annual tournament features the best of the best with local golfers challenging off-island players in a two-day competition.

SEPTEMBER

2013 Rotary Club of Saipan Youth Basketball League - The longest running basketball competition in the CNMI caters to U18 players and provides the Commonwealth a pool of fresh talents who will later suit up for the National Team.

2013 POWERade Banzai Memorial Off-Road Half Marathon and Fun Run – The annual race will have its eighth edition this year and will bring runners to the challenging course in the northern part of the island.

2013 NMIFA Youth Fall League - The year-ending competition of the Northern Mariana Islands Football Association holds weekend games in the various pitches on Saipan and feature club teams in the U6, U8, U12, U15, and U18 age groups.

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